QUERIES

AND

REMARKS

ON

HUMAN LIBERTY.

By JOHN MARTIN.

Thy Word is a Lamp unto my Feet, and a Light unto my Path. PSALM CXIX. 105.

LONDON:

Sold by J. BUCKLAND, Pater-noſter Row; H. GARDINER, and J. MATHEWS, in the Strand; T. and J. EGERTON, near White-Hall; by D. MURRAY, Princeſs-Street, Soho; and by SHEPERDSON and REYNOLDS, N° 137, Oxford-Street.

MDCCLXXXIII.

[Price Six-pence.]

BRITISH MUSEUM

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE words liberty and freedom are uſed, in the following pages, as ſynonimous; yet it is not meant to inſinuate, that thoſe words, in every ſituation in which they may be placed, convey, preciſely, the ſame meaning: perhaps, no two words are ſo much alike that they may, in every poſſible combination, be ſubſtituted the one for the other. But, where there is a neceſſity of a more frequent repetition of the ſame word than is pleaſing, to introduce others, (ſufficiently ſynonimous to ſecure the capital idea, and to avoid obſcurity,) is uſually allowed; and it is, ſometimes, thought commendable. What is here to be underſtood by the words liberty and freedom, the intelligent reader will be at no loſs to determine.

INTRODUCTION.

A Short Eſſay, in the form of Queries and Remarks, ſo written as to be of ſome uſe to them who wiſh to obtain, or preſerve the teſtimony of a good conſcience, is here attempted. Readers of a different deſcription, the following pages may poſſibly diſguſt; but thoſe for whom they were written, will read them with patience, and, poſſibly, to ſome advantage.

There may be pamphlets of this kind ſuperior to the preſent; but if there be any which make this impertinent, the writer has not yet been indulged with that treat.

Short

Short as this eſſay is, it is the reſult of frequent thought, and of ſome reading on this delicate and tender ſubject. But if it contains any thing well worth the reader's notice, it is, becauſe thoſe ſentiments were drawn from the original ſource of moral inſtruction: the pious mind will underſtand me to mean *the Word of God*. He who wiſhes to poſſeſs a knowledge that is practical, and, on this ſubject, to be conducted to a practice that is ſafe, let him conſult with humility, and with impartiality, that unerring rule of life: thus employed, he will find, that our real happineſs, and a conſciouſneſs of doing what we ought, are not to be divided. And what that is which

ought to be done by us, (our ſtate and ſituation being duly conſidered,) this, in a moral view, will ever be beſt learned from the page of revelation.

The Word of God is, what it is ſaid to be, *A lamp unto our feet*, in particular movements, *and a light unto our path*, Pſ. cxix. or general courſe of action: in the night of affliction, or temptation, it is a ſhining lamp; in the day of peace and tranquility, it is to us a more ſplendid light. As it contains an infallible rule of life, ſo, it exhibits alſo, to the truly penitent, a never-failing ground of relief under every proper view of paſt, and of preſent imperfection.

May

May the Divine Spirit, who is the ſource of ſacred revelation, incline our hearts to accept that relief which the Goſpel gives, and, thus relieved, to walk according to that rule which it preſcribes!

QUERIES

QUERIES AND REMARKS ON HUMAN LIBERTY.

QUERY I.

DOES not human liberty consist in doing what we please *?*

REMARKS:

It has been observed, and I think with some propriety, that *Aye*, or *No*, never yet answered any question.

Words are but the signs of our ideas, and our ideas † are only internal impressions of things perceived: things, therefore, ought to have the pre-eminence: they are the sons of heaven; words are the daughters

* Quid est libertas? Potestas vivendi ut velis.
CICERO.

† L'ideé représente l'object: la pensée le considere: l'imagination le forme. La premiere peint: la seconde examine: la troisieme séduit. Abbé GIRARD.

77

of the earth *. If ſo, when a query of any importance is ſtated, before we applaud or cenſure, we ought to aſk ourſelves ſuch queſtions as theſe: "Do I underſtand the "words by which this query is ſtated? "Do I underſtand them in that connection "in which they now appear? Have I, in "ſhort, received exactly, that quantum of "meaning which the propoſer intended to "convey?"

Object not, that ſuch inquiries would often impoſe ſilence on ſome that love to be loquacious: for, where would be the harm? Nay, by ſo doing, innumerable provocations would be prevented; and peace, domeſtic, civil, and religious, would, by ſuch ſilence, be happily preſerved.

Doing what we pleaſe, may be conſidered in a very contracted ſenſe, or in a ſenſe widely extended. Here, theſe words are to be taken in their greateſt latitude. "I ſpeak "now of actions, not reſtraining the term "to that narrow ſenſe which it bears when "we diſtinguiſh between actions, words, "and thoughts, but in its more extended and "general meaning, as it comprehends all

* See the preface to JOHNSON's DICTIONARY. Fol. Edit.

"that

" that we think, or ſpeak, or do *". Now, when in any act we do what we chooſe, we act voluntarily; and ſo acting, including all the modes of voluntary action, human liberty is here ſuppoſed to conſiſt.

To ſpeak of the liberty of the will in the manner that ſome chooſe to ſpeak, ſeems an inaccurate mode of expreſſion. To will and to chooſe is the ſame thing; but to aſk whether the will be free, is, in other words, to aſk, whether choice be choice. It is evident, what we purſue on choice, that we practically prefer, and what we prefer we chooſe †. Liberty then, is properly predicated, not of the will, but of the man, of every man, in every voluntary act.

As our liberty conſiſts in doing what we pleaſe, ſo, voluntary acts are juſtly denominated free, whether our choice ‡ be determined

* Placette on Conſcience.

† Whether we always chooſe what we prefer is not ſo certain. On ne choiſit pas toujours ce qu'on préfere; mais on préfere toujours ce qu'on choiſit. L'eſprit fait le choix. Le cœur donnée la préférence. C'eſt par cette raiſon qu'on choiſit ordinairement ce que l'on connoît, & qu'on préfere ce qu'on aime. Abbé Girard.

‡ What that is which *determines* our will, whether it be the laſt dictate of the underſtanding, or ſomething elſe, this is not ſo important for us to know, as it is to perceive

termined in haſte, or at leiſure; by motives that are pernicious, or by motives that are praiſe-worthy.

Our liberty, indeed, is always either contracted, or augmented, as our choice is determined with more or leſs of any kind of oppoſition. But ſhould any particular reſolve meet with check upon check, from without, or from within, yet, he who reſolves to do this, or that, or to forbear, is, in either of thoſe reſolutions, the proper object of praiſe or blame.

If I have ten motives againſt indulging myſelf in any act of unlawful liberty, ſtill, if I perform that act, it is evident, that I have ſome motives, or ſome one motive, that weighs more with me, and has a greater influence over me, than the preceding ten: in ſuch a caſe, though my choice be in ſome meaſure counteracted, I certainly do

the *nature* of that to which we are *determined*, and the nature of the *motive* that produced the *determination*. Suppoſe we are determined to that which is *evil*, whether it be by the underſtanding, or by this motive, or that, the nature of that evil remains unaltered. We way be *children in underſtanding*, when we fancy ourſelves to be men. 1 Cor. xiv. Our underſtandings may be *criminally contracted*. Luke xxiv. They may be *darkned*, becauſe of the *blindneſs*, or the hardneſs of our *hearts*. Ep. iv. What is the inference? "This: *Truſt in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not to thine own underſtanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he ſhall direct thy paths.* Prov. iii.

that which, upon the whole, I chooſe to do, and am, on that account, reſponſible for ſuch behaviour.

We ſhould not, then, imagine, that we never act voluntarily but when we act without the leaſt degree of internal oppoſition: for, in this ſenſe, who is free? In actions of the higheſt importance to our peace of conſcience, we know, that *when we would do good, evil is preſent with us.* Rom. vii. and that man muſt be in a deplorable ſituation indeed, who, being reſolved to do that which is evil, meets not with a ſingle check to counteract his wretched reſolution.

QUERY II.

Is doing what we pleaſe ever of any real value but when, doing what we pleaſe, is doing what we ought?

REMARKS:

If there be no rule directing us to do what we ought, what that is which ought not to be done, muſt remain unknown: nay, on this ſuppoſition, iniquitous actions can have no exiſtence; for *ſin is the tranſgreſſion of the law.* 1 John. iii. If evil actions

actions exiſt, they muſt exiſt as deviations from ſome law; becauſe, *where no law is, there is no tranſgreſſion.* Rom. iv. But where there is a deviation from the law, or will * of God concerning us, let it be on what

* When I ſpeak of the will of God, I mean not the *will of decree*, by which he has poſitively reſolved to do this or that, whether by himſelf, or by us. This will may very properly be the rule of his actions, according to that of the Scripture, *He doeth whatſoever pleaſeth him, in heaven, and in the earth*; but it cannot be the meaſure of ours, becauſe it is generally unknown to men: we are then only obliged to conform to it, when it diſcovers itſelf by the event. It is our duty then to acquieſce with a profound humility, in all the divine diſpoſals, whether agreeable or repugnant to our own inclinations and deſires.

I mean therefore, that *will of precept*, or command, in which, God has preſcribed to us what we ought to do, and which has rather our duty than our actions for its proper object. I would ſay, that by it God wills formally and immediately, not our doing what he commands, (for then our obedience muſt follow neceſſarily and infallibly,) but our being obliged to do it. And thus it is, his will always obtains effect: for whatſoever God has commanded, it is our duty to perform, whether we actually perform it or not.

This will is the conſtant and inviolable rule of action to the holy angels, as the Pſalmiſt teſtifies: *Bleſs the Lord ye his angels that excel in ſtrength, that do his commandments, hearkning to the voice of his word: Bleſs ye the Lord, all ye his hoſts, ye miniſters of his that do his pleaſure.* Pſa. ciii. The ſame will was a rule of action to our Lord himſelf; a rule to which he ſubmitted with the greateſt alacrity and joy. *My meat*, ſays he, *is to do the will of him that ſent me, and to finiſh his work.* John iv.

And

what pretence ſoever it may, there is moral evil; there is blameworthineſs; there it exiſts, whether we diſcern it or not; and it remains, though there ſhould be much in the myſtery of iniquity, which is to us paſt finding out.

If there be no wrongs, why are there any complaints? He who complains of being injured, conceives that the object of his complaint has acted unlawfully; and he

And is it not moſt highly reaſonable, that we ſhould conform our actions to a rule, which now directs thoſe of the angels, as it once did thoſe of our bleſſed Saviour? We, who have neither thoſe lights, nor that integrity and holineſs which ſhone in our bleſſed Redeemer, or which adorn thoſe pure and immortal ſpirits.

But farther, this will is infinitely wiſe, and moſt inflexibly juſt; that which ever follows juſtice, or rather, that which has juſtice for its conſtant and neceſſary attendant; inſomuch, that we muſt be guilty of a manifeſt contradiction, ſhould we ſuppoſe it capable of injuſtice, obliquity, or irregularity, in any one of its objects.

It is a will tranſcendently good, and truly beneficial to thoſe whoſe obedience it requires; which at the ſame time that it renders them more virtuous and more accompliſhed, renders them alſo more eminently happy and bleſſed.

It is the will of a Creator, to which the creatures ought by conſequence to ſubmit. It is the will of a Lord, and ſhall the ſervant preſume to diſobey it? It is the will of a father, of the moſt tender and indulgent father, is it not therefore what the children are obliged moſt gladly to embrace, moſt dutifully to perform?

PLACETTE on CONSCIENCE.

con-

conſiders the act which is the ſubject of his cenſure, as being voluntary; but, by ſo doing he does, in effect, admit, that freedom and folly may meet together, and that liberty and * licentiouſneſs may embrace each other.

A man may be a freethinker in aſtronomy as well as in religion; he may think, with the greateſt latitude of thought, concerning the magnitude and motion, the nature and influence of celeſtial bodies; he may deſpiſe the ſyſtems of antient and of modern philoſophy; he may, alike, reject the *Moſaic* ſyſtem, and theirs alſo, who, in their own eſtimation, are much wiſer than *Moſes* was; all this he may do, but what then? why, when his vanity is expoſed to public view, and that gloſs of novelty which gained a tranſient attention is worn off, then his worthleſs productions will be held in juſt contempt. Alas! ſuch is the vanity of man, that he who would follow none, ardently wiſhes to be followed by all: and ſuch is the providence of God, that they who refuſe to pay due deference to men of wiſdom and integrity, are often,

* LICENTIA *ſe met toujours en mauvaiſe part, liberté trop grande.* M. GARDIN DUMESNIL.

inſenſibly

inſenſibly inſlaved, or enſnared, by thoſe who are deſtitute of both.

A man may ſpeak, and write with unwarrantable freedom, and be, notwithſtanding this, extravagantly pleaſed with his own productions. Some may tolerate, but who can approve of ſuch indelicate liberty? The queſtion which we ſhould propoſe to ourſelves, when our own works are ſurveyed, ſhould not be, Are we highly pleaſed? It ought rather to be this; Were we to follow the dictates of a good conſcience, is it probable, that what now gives us pleaſure, would then yield us any ſatisfaction? In ſhort, that man muſt be very partial to ſome favourite word, or to ſome inchanting ſcheme, who can imagine that freedom and wiſdom, or that freedom and happineſs are always connected. You might as well tell me, that doing what we pleaſe is, at all times, doing what we ought.

When *Adam* ſinned and came ſhort of the glory of God; when *Cain*, irritated by pride and paſſion, ſlew his brother; when profane *Eſau*, ſold his birthright for a meſs of pottage; when *Abſalom* ſlew his eldeſt brother, *Amnon*, and attempted to dethrone his own father; when *Rehoboham* played the tyrant and loſt a kingdom; when the

Jews rejected *Jeſus Chriſt*, and *Pilate* condemned the *Meſſiah*, were not each of theſe tranſgreſſors a free agent? But who can conclude that freedom and wiſdom, or that freedom and happineſs were by them united? They reſpectively did what they pleaſed, but who will venture to ſay they did what they ought?

Repentance, whether it be legal or evangelical, ſhows that freedom and folly frequently meet, without diſturbance, in the ſame man. But this union cannot be laſting: for of what do men repent? Is it not of voluntary actions? See *Nineveh* in tears, clothed in ſackcloth and covered with aſhes. But whence this general, this accumulated affliction? Whence thoſe well-known ſigns of deep diſtreſs? The truth is, *Nineveh* did what ſhe pleaſed, but did not do what ſhe ought. She multiplied her abominations in various forms; but now, at the preaching of *Jonah*, ſhe is alarmed at the conſequences of her criminal freedom. *She ſowed to the fleſh, and of the fleſh reaped corruption.* Gal. vi. *She ſowed iniquity, and reaped vanity.* Prov. xxii. *She ſowed the wind, and reaped the whirlwind.* Hoſ. viii. And let me intreat the reader often

to recollect, that *whatſoever a man ſoweth, that ſhall he reap.* Gal. vi.

It is with freedom as it is with fear, the kinds are various; and ſome are good, and ſome are evil; for there are different modifications of each. Freedom of every kind, affords ſome degree of pleaſure to its poſſeſſor; and ſometimes the pleaſure reſulting from vicious freedom, or connected with it, is ſtrong and laſting. This is a ſnare to thouſands: But, admitting that pleaſure may be violent and vicious in the ſame inſtant, we cannot admit, that either the repetition or duration of vicious pleaſure can make it virtuous. We therefore conclude, that what the mind chooſes, what the heart prefers, and what our paſſions prompt us to purſue, is of no value; unleſs our choice be good, our preference juſt, and our purſuit lawful.

It is acknowledged, there are periods when it may be difficult to determine what that is which we ought to do. But at ſuch periods, an ardent and honeſt wiſh to know what is duty; a reſolution to regard it when diſcovered, and a determination to ſuſpend, if poſſible, that act which we do but ſuſpect to be wrong; this, with a growing acquaintance with that word which we have already

recommended, this will either ſave us from capital errors, or lead us quickly to renounce them. But in common, doing what we ought, is ſo far out of ſight, (eſpecially with them who are ardently bent on doing what they pleaſe,) that the triumph of paſſion over reaſon is every day conſpicuous. Falſe and pernicious eſtimates of human liberty, partially conſidered, precipitate many into this inglorious bondage. May theſe remarks, written to that end, lead ſome to perceive and avoid the artful ſnare!

QUERY III.

Is not human liberty always limited?

REMARKS:

Common ſenſe eaſily anſwers this query. She ſays, that our liberty conſiſts in doing what we pleaſe; and ſhe aſſerts, that no man always does, in every reſpect, what he wiſhes to do. The reader has ſufficient reaſon to aſſent to this aſſertion, whoſoever he may be: at leaſt, he muſt be conſcious that he is not the man.

If you imagine it is in the power of man even to think on what he could always wiſh to think, aſk that afflicted father, who this morn-

morning heard unexpectedly, that his only ſon fell from his horſe and ſuddenly expired. Aſk that young man, a ſtranger to ſober reflection, who was lately told on medical authority, that his conſumptive habit had reached its laſt ſtage, and that his exit faſt approached. Or aſk that poor and aged widow, who yeſterday followed to the grave the only friend ſhe had, and there left the man who ſoothed her fears, who ſoftened her ſorrow, and who was her ſole ſupport under all the alarms of poverty and age.

But, ſuppoſe we think on what we wiſh to think, is the train of thought, even on our moſt welcome ſubject, perfectly at our command? Is it always either as profitable, or as pleaſing as we could wiſh? Who will venture to ſay it is? But if freedom of thought be thus limited, if it be liable to be ſuſpended, reſtrained, or inverted, by ſleep, by ſurpriſe, by ſurrounding avocations, and by peculiar providences; providences which we cannot foreſee, or foreſeeing, cannot prevent; if liberty of thought be thus limited, who can expect that human liberty in any other view ſhould be exempted from ſimilar reſtraints? Neither our preſent conſtitution nor circumſtaces, neither our connections nor temptations,

tations, neither our frames nor feelings will permit us to hope for ſuch indulgence.

Man is a free agent, but he certainly is ſo only in a confined degree. And perhaps, ſomething analagous to this may be affirmed of every being. They *who have not the law, are a law to themſelves*, Rom. ii. and he who gave the law, *worketh all things after the counſel of his own will.* Eph. i. None, indeed, *can ſtay his hand, or ſay unto him, What doſt thou?* Dan. iv. Yet he hath condeſcended to aſſure us, that he *hath abounded towards us in all wiſdom and prudence.* Eph. i. And in one of the moſt awful diſpenſations of his providence, thus he ſpake: *Ye ſhall know, that I have not done without cauſe, all that I have done in it, ſaith the Lord God.* Ezek. xiv. This language allows us to infer, that the will and wiſdom of the Almighty are in perfect agreement, and, that the former always operates in conjunction with the latter. Happy would it be, if the will of man was always ſubject to his underſtanding, provided his underſtanding was in due ſubjection to the word of God. This ſubjection is juſt, becauſe, *the inſpiration of the Almighty giveth underſtanding.* Job xxxii. and becauſe, when moſt illuminated, it is *given*

us

us to know him that is true; 1 John v. yet this knowledge *is but in part*, being *finite*: 1 Cor. xiii. whereas the Divine underſtanding is *infinite*, Pſ. clxvii. and, by us, *unſearchable*. Job v. Rom. xi. Our liberty, therefore, in every view, has its proper limits, and, in many views, it is remarkably contracted.

With theſe facts, pride and ignorance make miſerable miſimprovements. Pride prompts us to magnify our freedom beyond the bounds of truth, and both pride and ignorance concur to indulge an ardent, but vain deſire, to throw off the diſguſting limits of legal liberty. If we trace this deſire to its immediate ſource, it will be found to originate from this fond conception, that human liberty, and human happineſs are ever connected; when, in truth, this can only be affirmed of holy liberty. Doing what we ought, is, indeed, eſſential to human happineſs, but doing what we chooſe, is not; unleſs what we chooſe, and what we ought to chooſe be united. This, however, is a connection which the proud abhor; and which too many, for obvious reaſons, do not ſo much as wiſh to comprehend.

I am

I am afraid, on civil as well as religious liberty, ſome love to ſpeak *great ſwelling words of vanity*. 2 Pet. ii. One might apply to many of theſe declaimers the exclamation of the poet;

"*Free, what and fetter'd with ſo many chains?*"

For, after all, human liberty is one thing in the irregular excurſions of fancy, but quite another thing in plain and ſober fact. He who is moſt free in fact, is, in all likelyhood, more limited than his vanity will ſuffer him to ſuppoſe: and, it is poſſible, whatſoever airs he may give himſelf before others, that he ſometimes meets with greater difficulty to fix his fickle choice, and, at other times, with more oppoſition in labouring to poſſeſs thoſe pleaſures which his paſſions urged him on to purſue, than he has courage to confeſs. And, when he is moſt ſucceſsful, how ſoon he relinquiſhes his raſh, but recent choice, and how ſeverely he cenſures what he was reſolved to enjoy, is not unknown. On this ſubject, the conduct and complaint of *Solomon*, ſhould not be forgot. *And whatſoever mine eyes deſired, I kept not from them; I witheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour, and this was my portion of all my labour.*

labour. Eccl. ii. So much for the ſwelling tide of ſelf-will. Who can ſtand before it? The ebb of mature reflection follows. Let us mark, and may we profit by the change of ſentiment! *Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and behold, all was vanity and vexation of ſpirit*. Eccl. ii. O Reader, give him credit! and believe me, though many have made ſimilar reflexions on doing what they choſe, yet they who chooſe to do what they ought, are happily exempted from ſuch mortifying reflexions. In fine, ſuch are our internal principles in the preſent ſtate of things, that they mutually counteract each other. We have rebelled againſt God, and we are in a ſtate of ſelf-rebellion. Concupiſcence and conſcience are at continual war. Will jars with will, and wiſh with wiſh. But, inſtead of giving way to diſguſt at the apprehenſion of limited liberty, let us attend to another query.

QUERY IV.

Suppoſe our liberty were unlimited, have we reaſon to conclude, that unlimited liberty would be of advantage to ourſelves, or to ſociety?

REMARKS:

It is certain, ſociety cannot approve of inveſting any man with unlimited liberty. As the moſt abſolute monarch is apt to fancy that he has more liberty than he actually poſſeſſes, ſo, it is evident, that he really has more liberty than the beſt and wiſeſt of his ſubjects could wiſh him to poſſeſs.

Who amongſt us would willingly grant any man indefinite liberty, either in the church, or in the ſtate? Not one; at leaſt, not one that knows and loves mankind. Who, then, could wiſh that every man might always be allowed to do whatſoever is right in his own eyes? None, I preſume, but thoſe who, for obvious reaſons, love to fiſh in troubled waters. Your levellers would have none above them; but they ſay not, (as *Selden* has obſerved,) how many they wiſh to ſee below them. Ambition is fond of lurking in popular pretences. He who has no hope of being crowned with ſucceſs by ſtriving lawfully, let us ceaſe to wonder if he ſhould attempt to ſeize that prize on which his heart is ſet by illicit nedeavours.

Society

Society trembles at the idea of making any man abſolute. If in the Roman Republic, impending ruin made the exiſtence of a *Dictator* unavoidable, he was elected with fear; he was limited, if poſſible, to a certain period, and, after every precaution that could be uſed, the reſignation of his tremendous office was expected with anxiety, and received with general ſatisfaction. In humbler ſcenes, the *Dictator*, whoſe word is law, is always diſguſting. He ever offends in common converſation. A patient, perhaps, may think it ſafe to yield abſolute ſubmiſſion to his well-known phyſician, yet while he ſo thinks, it is probable, that in ſome caſes, he ſhudders at the thought of this alarming expedient.

We have now called to mind what ſociety conceives of indefinite liberty; yet while they, by all their laws, ſhow themſelves averſe to grant any man unlimited liberty, ſome are too apt to imagine, that, in different departments of life, they could manage this ever-envied truſt with ſafety.

How long ſhall idle and intemperate conjectures be ſuffered to deceive us? We have, already, in our paſſage through life, been truſted with different portions of human freedom: and what has been the

conſequence? We have been boys, and now are men. From the reſtraints of parents, tutors and maſters, ſome of us have been emancipated: we have been to others what others once were to us; we have given ourſelves, it may be, in ſome inſtances, uncommon liberty. And now, let us be honeſt, and ſay, whether in the mirrour of ſedate reflection, it appears, that in proportion as our liberty and authority were augmented, we were truly happy.

It may be objected, that if liberty does not always conduce to happineſs, it muſt be abuſed. This is admitted; and, probably, our not obſerving with ſufficient attention in what the real value of human liberty conſiſts, this leads us, as much as any thing, to that abuſe. But, be that as it may, permit me to aſk, May we not in future do the ſame thing? Or will a ſtill greater portion of liberty effectually prevent us from future miſimprovements?

Would you then, ſome may reply, would you wiſh to deprive us of our liberty leſt we ſhould miſimprove it? By no means: I ſhould conſider ſuch treatment, even from a magiſtrate, not only as ungenerous, but as unjuſt. All men, without exception, are liable to abuſe their liberty, therefore, till

any

any man actually treſpaſſes on legal liberty, his perſon and property ſhould be deemed ſacred; and, in every guardian and expoſitor of the law he ſhould find a protector. *Rulers*, if juſt, *are not a terror to good works, but to the evil*. Rom. xiii. But that Ruler who terrifies me, not becauſe I am, but becauſe he ſuſpects I may be an evil doer, acts abſurdly; for he actually invades my right on a mere ſuſpicion that I poſſibly may invade the right of another. His Worſhip may think that my principles lead me to do evil; but let him have patience to wait till this appears. He ought to recollect, that he ſits on the bench as a judge, and not as a diſputant, and ſhould therefore, condemn on facts ſupported by proper evidence, and abhor the idea of making any man guilty by conſtruction.

On indefinite liberty I would further obſerve, that what no man who is ſerious can requeſt the Divine Being to grant, we may well conclude, no man ſhould wiſh to enjoy. But can any man who conſiders his relation to mankind, who conſiders his own nature, and the nature and end of ſociety; can any man who allows himſelf to think with ſobriety on theſe things, requeſt, that God would permit him to poſſeſs unlimited liberty? If

the ſhocking impropriety of ſo vain a ſupplication be manifeſt, ſhould we venture to teach for doctrine what we have not courage to carry into our moſt private devotion?

Liberty, like the wind to pilots, may be too much, or it may be too little. Too much, may drive our ſhattered barks on ſome quick-ſand, or on ſome fatal rock; too little, checks us in our faireſt courſe, and keeps us toiling to a ſlender purpoſe on the ſea of life. But too much, and too little, are relative expreſſions; and, as ſome veſſels, and ſome pilots, can bear to advantage much more wind than others, ſo, ſome perſons may be ſafely truſted with that portion of human freedom, which in other hands might prove pernicious. This remark may be applied to the ſame perſon at different periods. The child in whoſe hand a knife to day is dangerous, may, ere long, uſe it with the utmoſt ſafety.

Every law, human and divine, ſuppoſes that our liberty ought to be limited. It was reſtrained, by law, in Paradiſe; and ſince we loſt that fair poſſeſſion, are we left without law to God? The idea and deſire of unbounded liberty, iſſued in the ruin of our firſt parent; and his grand Seducer was, it ſeems, caught in the ſame ſnare.

Let us endeavour to be content with being men. Recollect, that the firſt propoſal to be ſomething more, was ſuggeſted by Satan himſelf.

If we ſuppoſe, that law and right are the ſame, (and whatſoever is not right is not law *,) then, limited and legal liberty differ only in expreſſion: to us, ſuch liberty is either diſguſting or pleaſing, as our minds aſſent to the external law under which we live, or as they diſſent from it: when theſe coincide, legal liberty is delightful; when they are heterogeneous, then, indeed, the external law is *the miniſtration of death.* 2 Cor. iii.

Charity rejoiceth in the truth. 1 Cor. xiii. Yet truth compels us to ſay, that all men, (I do not ſay all ſubjects only, but that all men,) have more liberty than they wiſely improve, or, its abuſe conſidered, than they will one day wiſh they had poſſeſſed. Here, that jealouſy which never ſleeps, will probably kindle in ſome a train of ſuſpicions. Were the writer preſent, they might be

* Should it be objected, that human laws are not always right; I ſhould anſwer, when that is really the caſe, they are not binding. Peter and John acted on this principle before the Rulers, Elders, and Scribes, at Jeruſalem. They nobly ſaid, *Whether it be right in the ſight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.* Acts iv.

ready

ready to demand, whether from the preceding fact, if it be a fact, I would encourage A. to abridge the liberty of B. I have replied to this before. However, I frankly anſwer, this ſhould never be done as A. is A. and B. is B. But if A. be a father, and B. his ſon; if A. be a maſter, and B. his ſervant; if A. be a judge, and B. a criminal legally brought before him, it may be right for A. to abridge the liberty of B. But if A. in ſo doing, does not act on real facts ſupported by proper teſtimony, and proportion his puniſhment to what is ſtrictly legal and juſt; in ſhort, if A. does what he chooſes, and not what he ought, he acts as an enemy to ſociety; and, ſo acting, he is, as it muſt at laſt appear, an enemy to himſelf.

QUERY V.

Does not the language of common ſenſe, even in common converſation, deſerve more attention on this ſubject than ſome are willing to admit?

REMARKS:

Common ſenſe, like the common law of this country, is an invaluable treaſure. Againſt the latter, the efforts of princes, par-

parliaments, and biſhops, have hitherto, been exerted in vain. May they never obtain the victory! Againſt the former, the ambitious, and the ſenſual, have levelled all their force; and, ſometimes, they have been ſupported by the united aſſiſtance of rhetoric, logic, and falſe learning; but common ſenſe yet ſurvives: May it never be ſubverted! *Mr. Locke* *, it ſeems, indulged himſelf with the pleaſing hope, that the time would come when the univerſities would be ſo reformed, that their phyſics would be fact, their metaphyſics common ſenſe, and their ethics human nature: whether that period be arrived, or is faſt approaching, I muſt leave the learned to determine.

It is not difficult for perſons poſſeſſed of common ſenſe to diſtinguiſh the different ſhades of human liberty for practical purpoſes. They may be ſtrangers to the diſtinctions of the learned, and much more ſo, to their ſcholaſtic terms; yet, in active ſcenes, they mark, with ſufficient preciſion, the fluctuating forms of human liberty. On proper occaſions, the language of common ſenſe is, "I do not underſtand this liber-

* See the finely-finiſhed Dialogues of the Rev. Mr. Hurd, now Biſhop of Worceſter. Vol. iii. 3d Edit.

"ty:" meaning, that liberty ſo taken is offenſive. She knows how, when neceſſary, to reprove in ſtronger terms. "Give me "leave to ſay, you are more free than wel- "come," is ſometimes her juſt rebuke. "This is liberty I would not wiſh to take; "this is unſufferable freedom;" is, at other times, her ſtrong remonſtrance. In perſonal conceſſions ſhe has been heard to ſay, "I "acknowledge, I was more free than wiſe: "were what I have done to do again, I "hope I ſhould not do it. I am aſhamed "of the liberty I have taken. Forgive me, "and in future I will endeavour to behave "with greater circumſpection." Theſe ſentiments are often felt when they are not expreſſed; and, by their influence over us, our future conduct is frequently regulated.

Epithets are pictures in miniature of the qualities of things; and, when they are properly introduced, they have a forcible effect. In common life, various epithets are added to the nouns liberty and freedom, which conciſely, but ſtrongly ſhow the practical ſenſe of mankind in their varied uſe of thoſe important words. Several of theſe epithets I have introduced into this eſſay, to qualify thoſe nouns which have, of neceſſity, ſo frequently occurred; and

the intelligent reader, will be at no loſs to conceive that other epithets of the ſame kind might have been introduced. I own, I pay a great regard to ſuch adjectives, when properly ſelected; they are a kind of mental mirrours, through which one ſees the native ſenſe of all ranks of men.

If there be any who ſay, we cannot have too much liberty; what they mean, I cannot conjecture. This I have obſerved, that the warmeſt patrons of almoſt unlimited liberty are as ſuſceptible of receiving affronts as other people. There may, however, be ſome hidden, better meaning in ſome of their warm expreſſions than I am able to explore: till I can, I mean to follow good ſenſe, however common, in preference to that ſenſe, which if it be fine, it is ſo flimſy, that I am afraid it is uſeleſs; and I have my apprehenſions it will not be laſting.

The prejudices of ſome learned men againſt what they are pleaſed to call the vulgar, is only to be equalled by their pride. Thus they ſpeak *: "I know, that in the "vulgar, religion is fear; conſtancy, bru-"tiſh obſtinacy; zeal, pride; friendſhip,

* See DR. CHARLTON's Natural Hiſtory on the Paſſions, 2d Edit.

" intereſt; and virtue itſelf but diſſimula-
" tion. I know alſo, that the multitude
" is not led by merit, but carried head-
" long by prejudice, to praiſe or diſpraiſe;
" and that they are more propenſe to ma-
" lignity and detraction, than to charity
" and candour. The vulgar then, and all
" that herd with them, I exclude from my
" ſtudies; leſt by perverſly interpreting
" them, (as they do all things,) they ſhould
" interrupt my tranquility, which I value
" infinitely above their favour, and where-
" in I endeavour to find a happineſs, which
" neither their hatred, nor the iniquity of
" fortune ſhall take from me."——Surely, this gentleman's tranquility was fixed on a ſlight foundation, which was ſo liable to be diſturbed by the opinion of thoſe whom he affected to deſpiſe. When the inſolence and cruelty of falſe philoſophy thus ſtalk before me, I read with increaſing gratitude the following facts: *For after that, in the wiſdom of God, the world by wiſdom knew not God, it pleaſed God by the fooliſhneſs of preaching to ſave them that believe.—Becauſe the fooliſhneſs of God is wiſer than men; and the weakneſs of God is ſtronger than men.* 1 Cor. i. But ſome may aſk, Are not illiterate men, though pious, ſometimes ſub-

ject to prejudices abſolutely indefenſible? Yes, frequently they are: and the different orders of their prejudices may in general be thus deſcribed: the vine is weak, and its wood is worthleſs; but ſhould any ſay, the grapes of the vine are not ſo excellent as the acorns of an oak, who would give him credit? Yet, ſomething like this, is not infrequently the error of learned men; at leaſt, of ſome who are ſo reputed. On the contrary, ſhould any contend, becauſe the grapes of the vine are more excellent than the acorns of the oak, that the vine has, in every reſpect, the pre-eminence, common ſenſe would be ſhocked at the aſſertion. Yet errors of a ſimilar kind the illiterate, though pious, are apt to indulge. In fact, neither the learned, nor * unlearned, are

* Of the inability of the illiterate, (carrying that term to things, as well as words,) to direct in difficult caſes, *Mr. Placette* has written with his uſual caution. *Monſ. Le Fevre*, preceptor to *Louis XIII.* ventured to ſay, "That what we uſually ſtyle caſes of conſcience, was "nothing elſe but the art of chicanery, or wrangling "with God." Some availed themſelves of this artful ſaying, and added, "That piety is not litigious, or does "not conteſt about trifles; and that an honeſt man's "conſcience is the beſt and wiſeſt caſuiſt." All this was ſaid, not in favour of piety, or a good conſcience, but to indulge the ſleep of ſin, and the dream of carnal ſecurity.

Placette

are to be followed without caution, though each ſhould be poſſeſſed of piety unfeigned. *For all fleſh is as graſs, and all the glory of man as the flower of graſs. The graſs withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever.* 1 Pet. i.

QUERY VI.

Is it not our duty, and our intereſt, as we are able, to take a deliberate and impartial view of this ſubject in the fear of God?

Placette replies, in a manner that does him honour; but I muſt content myſelf with quoting this ſmall part of his anſwer: "If," ſays he, "by an honeſt man's conſcience, "they mean the conſcience of one, who, though a ſin-"cere lover of God, yet is ſimple and illiterate, I main-"tain, that their aſſertion is utterly falſe. This experi-"ment may quickly be tried; 'tis but to take one of theſe "ignorant, though pious perſons, and to propoſe to "him ſome difficult caſe; it well then appear what capa-"city he has towards a ſolid determination. For my own "part, I have made the trial more than once; and, to "ſpeak ſtill more fully and generally to this buſineſs, I "likewiſe declare, that in the courſe of my life, I have met "with very few pious perſons, who, if they had not ſome "extraordinary talents, or ſome means of good inſtruction, "were not prepoſſeſſed with ſome falſe opinion, and guided "by maxims very unſound and erroneous."——The kingdom of God is a kingdom of light as well as of love. Matt. v. 16.

REMARKS:

Remarks:

It muſt be our duty, becauſe, we are commanded to *conſider our ways.* Hag. i. and are, each of us, accountable to the Almighty for our own conduct. *The deceived and deceiver are* * his. Job. xii. They are ſubſervient to the diſpenſations of his providence, and are ſubject to his righteous judgment. *If the blind lead the blind, both ſhall fall into the ditch.* This is alarming; but if the nature of this blindneſs be conſidered, and the perverſity of their temper who are, and love to be in moral darkneſs, be recollected, the ſentence of our Lord will not appear more awful than juſt. 'Tis true, *there is forgiveneſs with God, that he may be feared:* but, where ſin does not

* לו שוגג ומשגה Intelligo hoc non tantùm de ψευδοθρησκείαις, quas Græci appellant, (nam generaliter loquitur,) ſed de omnibus erroribus qui paſſim committuntur, etſi ſpecialiùs in politiis, ac civitatibus regendis; ubi quoſdam ſuſcitat Dominus qui homines in errorem pertrahant, ut fallax conſilium ſequantur, viamque pernicioſam ineant in malum ſuum. Senſus eſt, q. d. Non ſolùm bona facit Deus, ſed & mala diſpenſat, permittendo, ſcilicet, non ut auctor. Non quòd Deus errores efficaciter velit, ordinet, jubeat, vel ad eos impellat; ſed quòd ipſe videt, & juſto judicio permitti t, illum errare, hunc ſeducere.—1 Reg. xxii. Ezec. xiv. 2 Theſſ. ii. Vid. Poli Synopſis Criticorum, Job. xii, 16.

appear

appear to the ſinner abſolutely inexcuſable, and is not acknowledged to be, by any thing that he can do, inexpiable, what hath he to do with pardon? He may boaſt of that bleſſing, but he cannot enjoy it. As creatures then, accountable for our perſonal conduct, we ought to give deliberate, and ſerious attention to this ſubject, becauſe it is evident, that much of our conduct is formed on our fixed ideas of human liberty. Nor is this our duty only, it is our intereſt alſo, ſince we are always liable to err on practical ſubjects when God is forgotten, and immortality is out of ſight.

There is, it is to be feared, a whimſical turn in ſome, and ſomething ſo facetious in others, that ſeldom ſuffers them to be ſerious. Theſe unprofitable humours are impatient of fatigue; yet, without exerciſe, and deliberate attention, how little do we know of any important ſubject! While floating only on the ſurface of things, we are filled with ſuperficial conjectures, and are expoſed by every fancy that happens to be excited. Or if fixed, but pinioned down to a narrow circle, we grow partial and proud, with different degrees of inſenſibility. Theſe things are to be lamented;

and

and are, I believe, lamented much by many.

Were we deliberate, impartial, and ſerious, with humility, that light would break in upon us that is more reviving than the morning ſun. Had we no wiſh that truth ſhould be any thing but what ſhe is, ſhe would, comparatively ſpeaking, ſeldom be out of ſight. Did we always mean to obey her, ſhe would make us happy: happier far, than ignorance and error ever made or can make the ſons of men.

Were we, with ſuch diſpoſitions, to turn our beſt attention to human liberty, with the word of life in our hand, and the cloſe of life in our eye, we ſhould be convinced, that vice as well as virtue, miſconduct as well as good conduct, immorality as well as morality, are, alike, the reſult of doing what we pleaſe; and that, ſo doing, (an idea frequently repeated in this eſſay,) is of no value but as it actually coincides with doing what we ought.

Were we, with the diſpoſitions above recommended, to turn our attention to liberty as it ſtands connected with the worſhip of God, we ſhould be ſhocked at the audacious attempts of ſome, we ſhould be juſtly

offended at the glaring preſumption of others, and, poſſibly, we ſhould be alarmed at the continued ebullitions of an aſpiring temper in our own boſoms. By inſenſible advances, the abuſe of this kind of liberty has riſen, in many inſtances, to an enormous height. Some have aſſumed a diſpenſing power to change, or invert the order of poſitive inſtitutions: inſtitutions which the *Sovereign Paſtor*, 1 Pet. v. hath eſtabliſhed. They have even inſtituted new ones; and, in fact, gathered people together to theſe extra-inſtitutions, in their own names, and not in the name of Jeſus Chriſt. They have lorded it over God's heritage; and, in fine, uſurped a deſtructive power over the conſciences of men. Theſe are dreadful freedoms, yet commonly covered with the cobwebs of ſpecious pretences. They who, in different degrees, indulge this vicious liberty, contend, in their way, for candour, toleration, and a liberal way of thinking: but ſome who abound in theſe expreſſions, would be more honeſt if they would, at once, ſay, they think it convenient to *do evil that good may come*. Rom. iii. From prieſt-craft, and from lay-craft alſo, may grace and truth preſerve us!

I am

I am fully perſuaded, that if we were ſeriouſly and fully to inveſtigate the nature of human liberty, with the diſpoſitions that have been recommended, we ſhould pay a due regard to moral liberty, when any other mode of human liberty commandeth our attention. To imagine that philoſophical, civil, or domeſtic liberty, is not connected with moral liberty, is, I am convinced, an erroneous ſuppoſition. Religion hath always reſpect to the temper of our minds, on what ſubject ſoever they may be occupied. But our tempers are moſt tried where our wiſhes are moſt gratified, or where our wills are moſt oppoſed. Now, it is well known, that in converſation on civil and domeſtic liberty, theſe trials frequently occur. If then, in ſuch converſation, a juſt ſenſe of moral liberty be abſent from us, or irkſome to us, what muſt be the iſſue?—Philoſophical liberty may ſeem leſs dangerous; but ſurely, that philoſophy which propoſes to give law to moral conduct, ſhould be examined with the moſt rigorous attention. We know, that certain philoſophers of the *Epicureans*, and of the *Stoics*, in a very illiberal manner, encountered the apoſtle *Paul*; and that too, in a doctrine of the higheſt importance to our hope of

future felicity, and of the greateſt influence with reſpect to our Chriſtian conduct. We know, that the goſpel was by them, and by other Pagan philoſophers, accounted *fooliſhneſs*. We know, *that the world by wiſdom knew not God.* 1 Cor. i. Theſe are fair warnings.—But moral philoſophy is mightily improved ſince thoſe days. By what means? Is it not, ſo far as there is any fact in that aſſertion, by a plagiariſm eaſy to be detected, and which has been abundantly expoſed *? After all, though in the eighteenth century, let us not neglect the following caution: *Beware leſt any man ſpoil you through philoſophy, and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of this world, and not after Chriſt.* Col. ii.

Let us not be hectored, or flattered out of *the word of life*, Phil. ii. by which, if at all, we muſt be *made wiſe unto ſalvation.* 2 Tim. iii. The boundaries of truth are ſacred; and if they ſhould be hid from us, that is no proof they do not exiſt. Let the antient records be ſearched, and juſt and ſolid diſtinctions be duly eſteemed. Right

* See LELAND's Advantage and Neceſſity of the Chriſtian Revelation.

and wrong are not ſynonimous. Liberty to do that which is evil, (whatſoever be the motive,) is an evil liberty. And, of liberty thus modified, they ſeem to have the fulleſt poſſeſſion who are delivered *into chains of darkneſs, to be reſerved unto judgment*. 2 Pet. ii.

He then, who is poſſeſſed of moral liberty, and who regulates his ſtudy, his converſe, and his conduct by it, he is free indeed! Compared with him, other men are yet in bondage. So far as he is brought *into the glorious liberty of the ſons of God*, Rom. viii. his underſtanding is a law to his inclination, and the word of truth is both a light and a law to his underſtanding. Thus favoured, he gradually ſurmounts the native prejudices, and depraved propenſities of his own mind; ſo that, thoſe commandments which were once grievous, are now replete with moral excellence; and thoſe prohibitions, which were once deemed intolerable, now are acknowledged to be full of benevolence. At every ſtep, he has more felicity in doing what he ought, than any have, or can have, who makes his own will his perpetual dictator. His liberty is open to all, but

enjoyed

enjoyed by few. All that desire it, are welcome to possess it; yet how inconsiderable the number, who ardently desire this goodly portion! In fine, the man who answers to this description, knows how to esteem and improve civil liberty; and whether it be abridged or augmented, he is still the same man; having a law written on his mind, that teaches and inclines him to *esteem all men*, to *love the brotherhood*, to *fear God*, and to *honour the king*. 1 Pet. ii.

THE END.

CONTENTS.

IN this Eſſay there are Six QUERIES.

Under the First, *the* Nature *of Human Liberty is conſidered.*

Under the Second, *an* Eſtimate *of its real worth is given.*

Under the Third, *the juſt* Limits *of Human Liberty are, in a general view, aſcertained.*

Under the Fourth, *unlimited Liberty, is ſhewn to be* chimerical, *and illegal Liberty, to be* pernicious.

Under the Fifth, *the deciſions of* common ſenſe *are quoted and applauded.*

In the Laſt *Query, a* ſober *ſurvey of this ſubject,* in the fear of God, *is promoted; and the excellence of* Chriſtian Liberty *is exemplified, and cordially recommended.*

CONTENTS.

BRITISH
29DE71
MUSEUM